STUDY PROJECT

CLAUSEWITZ'S CONCEPT OF THE CULMINATING POINT AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

BY

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ABSTRACT

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With the publication of the 1982 edition of Field Manual 100-5, Operations, the U.S. Army presented a fighting doctrine rooted in classical military theory. Yet, doctrine, to be useful, must be accepted and understood in its own right by those who have to apply it. Clausewitz's idea of the culminating point is a good example. FM 100-5 cites the concept of the culminating point as central to understanding AirLand Battle and operational art and, consequently, explains it to its readers. The Clausewitzian concept of the culminating point is even more important to officers who plan and conduct theater operations.

This paper offers a critical analysis of the theory of the culminating point in the well known Gettysburg Campaign conducted by General Robert E. Lee in 1863. This Civil War battle has been the subject of more study and extensive written works than any other battle of the war and the student of military history would think that it would be rich in examples of the application of military theory, in this case the concept of the culminating point. Was the Clausewitzian theory of the culminating point evident in the campaign? Did Lee consider the concept and apply it to his decisions regarding the campaign? Did the campaign support the concept and add validity to it? In looking for these answers, the reader can better understand the application of the concept of the culminating point, and, thereby, become a better practitioner of turning scientific theory into artful tactics and operations.

Lee's 1863 campaign into Pennsylvania is an excellent case study from which to investigate many of Clausewitz's theories about war. The concept of the culminating point is particularly well served by what happened in the campaign. FM 100-5 has reintroduced the culminating point to the U.S. Army and has contributed to the educational process to help soldiers detect the culminating point with the "discriminative judgment" Clausewitz said was necessary. Studying campaigns like Gettysburg can be very useful for a better appreciation of theoretical and doctrinal concepts. A better understanding of theory and its relationship to doctrine is important; understanding the key concept of the culminating point is one example.

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Introduction

With the publication of the 1982 edition of Field Manual 100-5, Operations, the U.S. Army presented a fighting doctrine rooted in classical military theory. FM 100-5 seeks to adapt the modern battlefield to long-standing military principles and actual military experience in order to tie modern land combat methods and techniques to a strong foundation. The idea of evolving tactics and operations from sound principles is certainly necessary and even crucial, but doing so brought to the forefront some old concepts the U.S. Army and most officers had not studied in quite some time, if at all. Yet, doctrine, to be useful, must be accepted and understood in its own right by those who have to apply it. Clausewitz's idea of the culminating point is a good example. FM 100-5 cites the concept of the culminating point as central to understanding AirLand Battle and operational art and, consequently, explains it to its readers. The Clausewitzian concept of the culminating point is even more important to officers who plan and conduct theater operations.

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The three day battle at Gettysburg provides an opportunity to look at the culminating point from all three levels of war:

tactical, operational, and strategic. The tactical battle took place at Gettysburg by chance and not by the design of the two opposing generals. Lee's campaign into enemy territory was part of a larger strategy to help conclude the war. Lee's second northern campaign resulted in only one significant battle, yet it had important strategic implications.

Was the Clausewitzian theory of the culminating point evident in the campaign? Did Lee consider the concept and apply it to his decisions regarding the campaign? Did the campaign support the concept and add validity to it? In looking for these answers, the reader can better understand the application of the concept of the culminating point, and, thereby, become a better practitioner of turning scientific theory into artful tactics and operations.

Acknowledging and understanding the culminating point theory will assist today's military commander in preparing a campaign plan that intentionally prevents his force from reaching its culminating point or, at least, will alert the commander that his force may be approaching its culminating point so he can make counteracting decisions. Additionally, understanding the culminating point concept will allow a commander to take advantage of such a situation if an enemy passes its own point.

In operational theory, the culminating point is that time in every offensive operation, unless it is strategically decisive and ends the fighting, where the strength of the attacker no longer significantly exceeds that of the defender, and beyond which continued offensive operations therefore risk over-extension, counterattack, and defeat.[1] FM 100-5 also adds that the aim of attack

at all levels is to achieve decisive objectives before reaching the culminating point. Conversely, the art of defense is to hasten the culmination of the attack, recognize its advent, and be prepared to go over to the offense when it arrives.[2] As noted above, recognizing its advent is critical to the decision making and execution process. A commander must know more than what a culminating point is, he must be able to sense or recognize it in his own forces or those of the enemy and then be prepared to take action. Clausewitz noted the difficulty in recognizing the culminating point when he stated, "If we remember how many factors contribute to an equation of forces, we will understand how difficult it is in some cases to determine which one has the upper hand. Often it is entirely a matter of the imagination. What matters therefore is to detect the culminating point with discriminative judgment."[3]

Given that it is important to recognize the culminating point for one's own operational success, but that it is difficult to do so, would not some common indicators be beneficial to the commander to help his "discriminative judgment?" FM 100-5 gives the following examples of events that move an operational offensive to its culminating point.

> The forward movement of supplies may be insufficiently organized or may lack needed transport, or available stocks may be exhausted. The need to protect lines of communications from partisans or regular forces operating on the flanks or in the rear may have sapped the strength of forward forces to the point that the attacker no longer has the needed quantitative advantage. The attacking force may have suffered sufficient combat losses to tip the balance of forces. The attacker may have entered terrain which is more easily defended. The soldiers of the attacking army may become physically exhausted and morally less committed as the attack progresses. The defending force may have become more determined as large portions of territory are lost.

> The defender may have been joined by new allies who now also feel threatened. All of these causes, and combinations of them, have resulted in offensive culminating points.[4]

Until the 1982 edition of Operations, the idea of the culminating point seldom was spoken of or written about, yet it occurs in every battle and campaign, excepting those where the attacker achieves success without stopping. The concept of the culminating point is certainly still relevant and applicable. Like many other Clausewitzian concepts, it serves as an underlying principle of U.S. Army doctrine, as indicated by FM 100-5's allocation of an appendix to key classical concepts. Military professionals should not become overly concerned with the culminating point but it must be part of their vocabulary and understanding of Army doctrine. Eleven years ago, the Army raised the concept to a higher level of consciousness and encouraged officers to discuss it openly during the preparation and conduct of operations. FM 100-5 writes of the culminating point, "While not new to the U.S. Army in application, (it has) not been dealt with in doctrinal literature for some time, and (its) terminology may therefore be unfamiliar to many American soldiers."[5] The concept of the culminating point should be part of an operational mind-set, and it should be used conscientiously.

The Gettysburg Campaign

Historical accounts often describe the Gettysburg battle or campaign (often used incorrectly to refer to the same event, the battle) as the high-water mark in the Confederacy's military effort for independence. From that point on, the military fortunes and

capabilities of the Confederacy declined, ultimately resulting in Lee surrendering his Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Courthouse, nearly two years after Gettysburg. At face value, does that imply that Gettysburg was, in fact, the strategic culminating point of the Confederacy? On the other hand, volumes have been written about both the battle and the war presenting numerous reasons for the eventual outcome. In all likelihood, a combination of all the various reasons contributed, including: the overwhelming preponderance by the Union in most sources of economic and military power, better Northern political leadership, loss of public will and unity in the Confederacy, and Southern military setbacks, to include Gettysburg. The relationship of the Gettysburg Campaign, the culminating point, and the end of the war evidently requires a closer study. Gettysburg was a pivotal battle in the Civil War and clearly shows the application of mid-19th century American military doctrine by each side's commanding generals.

The issue is not whether or not Lee knew and employed the concept, but does the Gettysburg Campaign, one of the largest ever conducted on American soil, offer a useful historical example of the theoretical concept? This analysis shows that it does.

Most students of the Civil War will agree with T. Harry Williams in "The Military Leadership of North and South", an essay in Why the North Won the Civil War, that Lee was the Confederacy's best general and preeminently a great theater strategist.[6] Historian Jay Luvaas adds these comments about Lee.

> Lee was well prepared for his new command, much better in fact than any of his opponents before Meade. And as Clausewitz described it, Lee possessed the combination of intellect and temperament that together constitute military

> genius--moral and psychological courage, a "skilled intelligence to scent out the truth," the ability to make sound decisions in the midst of action, determination, presence of mind, and boldness. He certainly understood that his command philosophy, to bring his troops to the right place and at the right time, worked at the operational level.[7]

Lee learned his doctrine practically the same way all Civil War regular army generals had, from study and from experience both in the earlier Mexican War and their own actions in the early phases of the War of Secession.

Lee was not only the Confederacy's best general, he was its best practitioner of Jominian military theory. The influence of Napoleon on Lee was profound. Lee was not so much a disciple of Jomini than of Napoleon himself. "From their study of his campaigns they drew more aggressive strategic concepts than had any previous American generals."[8] Jomini deduced most of his theories of war from the Napoleonic Wars and Lee had studied Napoleon's campaigns directly. When Lee was superintendent of West Point from 1852-1855, a Napoleon Club flourished with Dennis Hart Mahan as the faculty instructor. Of the fifteen books Lee checked out of the library at West Point, seven were about Napoleon.[9] In many aspects, Lee's days as West Point's Superintendent were equivalent to the modern senior service college experience. Lee formalized his philosophy for theater operations and the conduct of war there and put it into practice six years later. Lee often expressed his admiration of Jomini.[10]

Of Jomini's many thoughts on the conduct of war, the Swiss theorist most emphasized:

> --direct and concentrated approach that concluded on an aggressive, massed frontal assault
> --battlefield maneuver and flanking operations as difficult and risky
> --the spirit and the superiority of the offense

--the advantage of speed
--if invaded, take the battle to the enemy and invade his territory
--the objective is always the enemy force
--operational maneuver to put your force at the decisive point in the decisive battle

Lee exhibited many of these Jominian concepts throughout the Civil War and quickly revealed himself to be an unqualified advocate of the offense, to seek out and destroy the enemy.

Although American tactical and strategic thinking in the early and mid-nineteenth century largely followed Jomini and the French lead, another theorist, this one an American, also directly contributed to the way Americans executed war. Dennis Hart Mahan, an engineer and faculty instructor at West Point, by force of personality and intellect, exploited to full advantage his unique opportunity to influence the Civil War generation of regular officers, be they students or faculty. In the American tradition of small armies of citizen-soldiers and not wanting to waste leadership or manpower, Mahan advocated the primacy of the active defense: compel the enemy to attack you under disadvantage and then assume the offense when he has been cut up. (Culminating Point Concept!) Mahan introduced and championed field fortifications to the officer corps for this very reason. Mahan did not maintain the superiority of the entrenched defense beyond its purpose, as offensive action was ultimately required and indispensable for final success.[11] Mahan emphasized as well operational maneuver to occupy the enemy's territory or strategic points.

Clausewitz and his concept of the culminating point was almost certainly not an influence on Lee or others at that time. Clausewitz's book On War was not published until 1832 and then not

widely translated and studied until the 1870's. Nonetheless, Lee recognized to some degree the basic concept of the culminating point, although not Clausewitz's specific concept and definition. All soldiers of all ranks know that you can attack until one of three events happen: you win, you become too weak to continue and then you defend, or you lose. Lee, through his actions in 1861 and 1862, demonstrated well his knowledge about how not to overextend his forces and to preserve them from decisive defeat.

Before looking at Lee's campaign strategy, it is first important to review some of the relevant events leading up to his 1863 offensive into Pennsylvania. The Confederacy, as the weaker nation and militarily outnumbered, intentionally maintained the strategic defense during 1861 and 1862. The young government sought the moral high ground as a means to encourage European powers to grant official recognition to the Confederate States of America and the subsequent aid and trade that would accompany that diplomatic acknowledgement. From their viewpoint, the Confederacy was a new nation-state following its manifest destiny and only defending itself against the North. Although several generals, including Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, advocated an invasion of the North to carry the battle to them, Jefferson Davis's government would not allow such an operation.

Every battle or campaign thus far, except two, had taken place in Confederate territory and had started with the Union's armies on the offensive. The Army of Northern Virginia, on the operational defensive, would usually conduct a tactical maneuver or turning movement and force the North onto the defense, usually followed by a Union defeat. Since June 1862 Lee had demonstrated an offensive

supremacy over the Union armies, particularly at Second Bull Run and Chancellorsville. The lone exception to the battles taking place on southern land in the East occurred in 1862 when Lee crossed the Potomac into Maryland and was stopped at Antietam. By the third year of the war, both armies had become equally formidable on the defensive.[12] A general stalemate was building in Virginia.

The successes of the Army of Northern Virginia did much to add to the laurels of the Confederacy's eastern army and its commanders. The battles also revealed deficiencies and took their toll of men and supplies. Even the many victories for the South usually extracted higher casualties, as a percentage of men available, for Lee than for his enemy. Supplies, food, and even horses and mules were in short supply in the fall of 1862.

> By November, the subsistence standard for Lee's army was in crisis. 75% of Confederate horse losses came from starvation, disease and abandonment when the animals were too weak for service. By the winter of 1862-63, out of food, fodder, supplies, and equipment and dependent on day-to-day rail shipments from North Carolina, the Army of Northern Virginia was concentrating more on its supply route than on the Army of the Potomac.[13]

Limited relief did not come until spring vegetables and grass returned the following year.

Other decidedly military shortfalls went uncorrected. They were a precursor for events at Gettysburg. Lee worked with an unwieldy command and control system. Vertical and horizontal communications were slow, if they occurred at all. Courier and guide systems were inadequately staffed, resulting in uncoordinated and piecemeal movements and attacks. As G.F.R. Henderson, the noted British Civil War historian noted, "Lee's staff was too small, inexperienced, and ill trained to maintain communications."[14] Even Lee's orders and

instructions to his commanders were often ambiguous. He often omitted details because he assumed everyone understood his intent, and Lee's philosophy of command usually permitted his commanders too much discretion in execution.[15]

The first two years of fighting also saw new technology that changed tactics. Lee and some of his maneuver commanders were slow to embrace the effects of the rifled musket with which both sides were now armed. Lee maintained a penchant for frontal attacks long past their practical use against the increased accuracy and range of the rifle in the hands of defiladed men.[16] These frontal (and costly) attacks often resulted from the same faulty staff work and coordination that impeded other military operations.

Lee did deviate from Napoleonic tactics by using his cavalry in non-traditional roles such as conducting strategic and operational reconnaissance, screening, attacking enemy communications and guarding his own lines of communications. But even this innovative use of his cavalry would be his most grievous deficiency during the Gettysburg Campaign.[17]

Lee now faced a dilemma in mid-1863. The Army of Northern Virginia's tactical successes and offensive spirit ran counter to the government's defensive strategy and the continual worsening supply situation. By the end of May 1863, although the northern army had suffered heavy losses at Chancellorsville, it still was intact, growing stronger, and could renew the offensive if given a breathing spell. The Confederates, however, could not afford to wait. Lee felt they had to gain a decisive victory that summer, as time was running out and never again would the South be so strong.[18]

To wrest the initiative away from the Union, the Confederates would have to attempt to control the shape of the war and concentrate forces at points of their choosing to achieve at least a measure of parity. Lee said, "We must decide between the positive loss of inactivity and the risk of action. It is only by concentration of our troops that we can hope to win any decisive advantage."[19] Lee felt the Confederate's politically defensive purpose in the war did not necessarily require a total rejection of an offensive strategy. Lee also knew that, in time, Hooker might eventually carry Richmond through sheer weight of numbers and the use of siegecraft. As well, Federal forces were penetrating Virginia from Ohio, the Atlantic coast was under pressure, and the stronghold at Vicksburg on the Mississippi was surrounded.[20] As early as February, 1863, Lee had secretly told his staff engineer to prepare detailed maps leading to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; he now called for those maps.

On 8 June, Lee asked permission to attack into the Union stating he was fully aware of the hazard in taking the war north yet believed little was to be gained by staying on the defensive. Two days later the Secretary of War responded by saying he considered aggressive action indispensable, that "all attendant risks and sacrifices must be incurred. I have not hesitated, in cooperating with your plans, to leave this city (Richmond) almost defenseless."[21]

After Chancellorsville Lee took steps to recondition and strengthen his army before the start of the Gettysburg campaign. One of Lee's most pressing needs was highly qualified senior leadership. He devoted great care in selecting and reorganizing his command structure so as to obtain the best possible leaders. Lee also

reduced the span of control of his corps commanders by restructuring the size of his corps from 30,000 to approximately 20,000 soldiers to gain a more responsive force. Instead of having just two ponderous corps, Lee went with three more potent and agile corps to gain better command and flexibility. Lee directed other changes in his artillery and cavalry to increase their efficiency by reorganizing the artillery under a corps artillery commander for more centralized control and a consolidation of separate cavalry units to double Stuart's cavalry division. Field ordnance and service supply units repaired or rebuilt large quantities of cannons, rifles, harness, and other equipment. The army recalled units loaned out to other commands or on special duty and gained several brigades from coastal defense duty. And the already lean army further reduced all unnecessary equipment so the supply trains could be made as small as possible to increase speed and decrease the need for guarding unneeded wagons. Thus Lee started the campaign in the best condition the Army of Northern Virginia had been in in some time. Lee's preparations for the invasion reveal a consideration of the concept of the culminating concept, if not explicitly, then implicitly in the possibilities he tried to guard against and in which he had control over. "At this stage of the war a major victory in the East would go further toward solving the strategic dilemma of the Confederacy than any other event, and Lee's army had the best chance of achieving that goal."[22]

Lee's strategy for the invasion of the Union, derived from several sources written before and after the campaign, generally revolved around these elements:

--use the Shenandoah and Cumberland Valleys as a line of invasion to Harrisburg, PA
--in so doing, threaten Washington, D.C.
--cut the main east-west rail line at Harrisburg
--draw the Army of the Potomac out of its defenses as it moves to protect Washington
--by making the North turn, forestall their summer campaign to attack Richmond
--select a strong defensive position and let the Union attack him
--do not seek a general battle but try to catch the Union off balance to destroy it piecemeal
--create an important diversion in favor of Vicksburg

Historians generally agree about Lee's course of action but give different weight to some of his motives. Edward Hagerman, in The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare, gives Lee credit for thinking that the only real goal for taking the war to the north was the hope that a negotiated peace might result from the Confederacy dealing from relative strength by threatening Washington or severely damaging the Army of the Potomac. Lee also intended, at the least, to help the northern peace party gain ascendancy in the upcoming presidential elections.[23]

Henderson does attribute the idea of fighting a decisive battle as part of Lee's strategy.[24] James Stuart Montgomery, in The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg, supports Henderson's belief that Lee's plan was to defeat the tired, hard marching, and strung out Union army by concentrating the Confederate forces and throwing an overwhelming force at the North, driving one enemy corps back on another, and by successive repulses before they could concentrate, create a panic and virtually destroy them. Montgomery credits this as being Lee's true vision of the campaign as it was recorded at the time by a Major General Trimble, one of Lee's staff officers.[25]

Luvaas thinks that Lee never did intend to fight one large decisive battle unless attacked and forced to; Lee's strategy was offensive but involved defensive tactics once the campaign was north of the Potomac River. Lee himself wrote in his after-action report, "It had not been intended to deliver a general battle so far from our base, unless attacked."[26] Luvaas also points out Lee issued orders to his subordinates not to bring on a general battle.

The difference in opinions comes down to Lee's meaning of "decisive" and "general" battle. Lee knew his army was outnumbered in both infantry soldiers and cannons, approximately 57,000 to 105,000 and 250 to 300 respectfully. Coddington, in The Gettysburg Campaign, simply concludes that "although Lee was not seeking a 'general' or pitched battle with the Union army, he would try to catch it off balance and destroy it bit by bit."[27] Coddington also credits Colonel A.L. Long, Lee's military secretary, as explaining Lee had no intention of taking a big city, such as Harrisburg, Philadelphia, or Washington. Those cities would easily fall if he defeated the Army of the Potomac.

As noted earlier, another key reason that impelled Lee to go north was that the Virginia countryside was almost exhausted and needed relief from the pressure of supporting the Confederate army with food and supplies. An invasion of Pennsylvania would give northern Virginia time to recover and allow the Army of Northern Virginia to procure much needed food, fodder, and supplies from the rich and untouched northern countryside. Lee's army would not only subsist better, but would be able to acquire excess provisions to return to Virginia. Another advantage would be that Lee would have

freedom of maneuver with no pressing requirement to protect Richmond. Lee had the benefit of not defending any particular piece of terrain, other than what he chose for his own advantage. If the Confederates were not forced into a major engagement, they could stay in Pennsylvania for a considerable time.[28]

Another factor weighing heavily in Lee's consideration of an offensive strategy was that he knew in war morale, according to Napoleon, means as much sometimes as three times the physical quantities of men or equipment. Lee, now as he had in the past, relied heavily on this concept. After another defeat at Chancellorsville in early May 1863 and following so many successive disasters, the Union army was not likely to be full of enthusiasm; in contrast the Confederate Army, after so many victories, was marching with spirit and boldness.[29]

In summary, General Lee had a military strategy and an operational concept he was confident in and which he believed could conclude or at least greatly shorten the war to the Confederacy's advantage. At a minimum, the campaign would deny the Union the initiative to advance on Richmond and would allow the Army of Northern Virginia to subsist off of the fertile, previously unforaged northern countryside. Lee benefited from the high morale of his troops, the support of his government, the flexibility of the initiative and freedom of action, and the prospect of better supply with no constraints associated with lines of communications. He did lack overwhelming force, but no differently than the past two years in which he had successfully out-maneuvered the Union.

Montgomery, in The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg, used these words to portray the significance of the campaign.

> The risk had been well calculated. It was now or never. On the outcome of this campaign Lee was staking the life of the Confederacy. He, personally, had named the game and set the stakes. This second invasion of the North had been Lee's idea. Mr. Davis had acquiesced and given him free rein. The strategy involved was not only military, but also political. The results of success or failure seemed to stand out as clearly as the figures in a bookkeeper's balance sheet. The alternative to this bold bid for a fruitful victory was to settle down in Virginia for a prolonged defensive campaign, with the South daily growing hungrier and weaker while the North gained in relative strength.[30]

Henderson agreed with Montgomery in the belief that Lee had calculated the risks and was confident in his decision. A passage Henderson attributed to Lee provides an indication that Lee considered the concept of his culminating point and believed he could prosecute the campaign without exceeding it. Lee said that a commanding general puts himself in his enemy's situation and "thus learns for himself, looking at things from his enemy's point of view, whether or not apparent risks are not absolutely safe."[31] Lee evidently thought his campaign was safe and achievable as opposed to a desperate gamble.

Thus, Lee was now ready to execute his campaign, a plan based predominantly on the assumption that the Union forces would have otherwise resumed the offensive against Richmond in the summer of 1863. But Lincoln was also planning a new strategy.

> Lincoln and Halleck also devoted much of their intellectual energy to solving the problem of operations in Virginia. They did not believe that a siege of Richmond would inevitably succeed; rather they saw a siege as presenting the well-entrenched Confederates with an opportunity to economize on men in the defensive, enabling them to spare troops to reinforce other armies or to use their Shenandoah Valley base to threaten a raid across the Potomac. Thus Lincoln and Halleck decided to change their objective. They

> would no longer attempt to reach Richmond, but would use the Army of the Potomac to keep Lee well away from Washington and wait for him to make a mistake that would permit the Army of the Potomac to attack him with advantage and hurt his army. They looked to the West, particularly to Grant, for their important achievements.[32]

Would Lee have moved on Pennsylvania had he known that Lincoln and General in Chief Halleck now viewed Virginia as a theater of secondary importance with no planned offensive against Richmond? Lee, without this knowledge and confident in his decision, now committed his forces to a course of action that Lincoln, because of a turn of Union strategy, would welcome.

Starting on June 3rd, the Army of Northern Virginia again out-maneuvered the Union army by conducting a flank march to the west with two corps while the remaining corps maintained contact. General Hooker was not aware until June 9th of Lee's movement and then was undecided as to what it meant. With the third and remaining corps now following, Lee's army stretched over 100 miles by mid-June, marching as many as 30 miles on some days with the whole army averaging 15. Lee took advantage of the Blue Ridge Mountains for protection from a Union flank attack yet he could always threaten an attack east through the mountain passes, since he had stolen the march and was on the flank of the Army of the Potomac. The Army of Northern Virginia, victorious and stronger numerically than it had been for sometime, anticipated another smashing success which could easily end the war.[33]

But Lee, always aware that he was outnumbered and perhaps wanting to hedge or reduce his risks, recommended on June 23rd that President Davis pull troops from coastal duty and from guarding Richmond to form another Confederate army in northern Virginia to

threaten Washington from the south while Lee continued north. This action would force Hooker to guard Washington and give complete freedom of movement to Lee. Perhaps Lee was having second thoughts or only prudently attempting to improve his odds but, in any event, Davis did not think he had the forces available and Lee's recommendation came too late. Soon events, rather than generals, would be controlling the armies' actions.[34]

The invasion thus far was quite successful in Lee's view as his army was buying or impressing all the supplies they needed in Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley. Lee had his three corps spread out for this very purpose since he thought the Union Army was far to his south. Lee had now been in Union territory for 14 days.

But on the evening of June 28th a spy carried important news to Lee. The Army of the Potomac had already crossed the Potomac River and was converging on Frederick, Maryland, approximately 30 miles south of Gettysburg. Lee's astonishment upon learning this is somewhat puzzling since the design of his strategy was predicated on the Union army following him, and for over a week prior to this information Lee had anticipated his enemy's advance.[35] Nonetheless, Lee was taken back. Lee also heard the news that Lincoln had replaced General Hooker with General Meade, but Lee considered this to his benefit since the change of command would bring more confusion and adjustments to the Union army than to his own.

The proximity of the Union army earlier than anticipated forced Lee to modify his plan. He could no longer keep his forces scattered over the countryside happily enjoying the fruits of a rich land. His expedition, which until this point had had all the aspects of a huge

raid, now took on a more ominous character and developed into a maneuver for advantage.[36] Lee had but a couple of days to plan and reflect upon a course of action. The Army of Northern Virginia could stand and fight or maneuver for operational advantage. As Lee contemplated the possibilities he told his corps commanders to concentrate at Cashtown, 10 miles west of Gettysburg. Many of those forces were still two day's hard march from there.

Against the wily and cautious Meade, Lee would have to attack or withdraw. If Meade proved very slow and circumspect in initiating an assault, it would force the Confederates to wait for battle, but remain concentrated because of the immediate presence of the Army of the Potomac.[37] This concentration of Lee's forces hampered his options since no location could long support a foraging, stationary force of 70,000 for more than 48 hours. And with the arrival of more and more Union forces, the Confederate's area of support would decrease even more; the Army of Northern Virginia would surely grow weaker. Lee would have to make a decision quickly. Meade could afford to wait.

Lee's options were:

--Await in a prepared position for a Union attack. While the force ratios would make this better for Lee, the supply situation would not support it.

--Move around the left flank of the Federal army and interpose between them and Washington to force a Union attack on ground of Lee's choosing. Lee dismissed the flank movement as out of the question since he did not have control of his cavalry, an absolute requirement for such an operation. This type of movement would also

disconnect Lee from the Shenandoah Valley and remove him from his line of communications and somewhat protected line of return to Virginia.

--Retreat, but doing so would give Lincoln the moral results of victory. As well, the withdrawal, probably under pressure and through the mountains, would be difficult and dangerous.

--Or attack. As part of his campaign strategy, Lee had said his preference was to attack the strung out Union army one corps at a time and force them back upon themselves in disarray. In fact, this opportunity was now present had he had his cavalry to seek out and provide this information.

From the opposing point of view, Lincoln and Halleck viewed the developing situation as the opportunity to hurt Lee's army for which they long had hoped and waited. The Army of the Potomac moved north, keeping east of Lee. Meade had "been long enough in the war to want to give the Confederates one thorough good licking before any peace is made, and to accomplish this," he wrote, "I will go through a good deal." Meade began selecting defensive positions south of Gettysburg.[38]

Lee was missing one thing critical to his campaign and a strength of his army, J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry and with it information about the enemy it acquired. From the time Lee started his invasion until the second day of the battle, Lee knew little about what the opposing army was doing. Lee was surprised the Union army had closed on him when it did, denying him the time to concentrate and choose appropriate actions. Lee also lacked the information that Meade was moving his corps to Gettysburg as quickly as possible, but still as

corps in separate "wings". Thus Lee missed the opportunity to attack them separately as he preferred to do. Lee could have easily inflicted a conclusive defeat on the first two corps which formed the Federal's advance guard. Whether the cause of Stuart's absence was Lee's vague orders or Stuart's self-serving glory ride, the result was Lee went without critical information and thus entered a battle not to his advantage. In the face of Meade's perceived hesitancy to attack, Lee reluctantly planned what he had earlier come to reject: tactical victory by frontal assault.[39]

On July 1st with both armies still concentrating, one of Lee's division's entered Gettysburg to acquire boots and was surprised by an advancing Union force. This chance engagement would now commit Lee to attack the Union as vigorously as possible at Gettysburg, a location henceforth referred to as the Confederate's high water mark in the Civil War.

Both sides rushed to the sound of the guns with Lee in excellent shape that evening to defeat the Union's lead corps before Meade could mass his forces. Lee gave orders for a coordinated attack "as early as practicable" on July 2nd by his left and right corps on both Union flanks. Meade had only four of his seven corps present in the early morning. General Richard Ewell attacked the Union right early in the morning but General James Longstreet did not commence his attack until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. However, by 8 A.M. Meade had concentrated six of his seven corps by marching them through the night. Both Ewell's and Longstreet's assaults gained some ground but were not decisive. Ineffective command, control, and coordination again detracted from the valor of Lee's men in the line.

In spite of this, Lee was still confident. General George Pickett's division had just arrived and Stuart rode in with his cavalry. Lee's aide-de-camp stated that "an overweening confidence possessed us all."[40] On the third and last day of the battle, Lee expected a demoralized and unnerved Union army like he had faced in previous battles of the past two years. What he found was a resolute, confident and even cheerful enemy. After having tried the left and right flanks, there remained only the center, and Lee was determined to try Napoleon's decisive stroke there.[41]

Again, Lee devised a coordinated attack by several divisions from two corps converging on the center of the Union's defenses to split it, and ultimately defeat the Army of the Potomac. "So confident was he in the powers of the gallant men he had led so often to victory that, difficult as was his task, Lee never seems for a single moment to have despaired of success."[42] But the final assault, known thereafter as Pickett's Charge, was a disaster. As a result, Lee's invasion of the north ended in a single battle, a victory for the Union, and a "thorough good licking" for the Confederates as both Lincoln and Meade had hoped for.

As noted earlier, FM 100-5 cites examples of events that might move an operational offensive to its culminating point. Several of those points were evident in what happened at Gettysburg and, although Lee acted to lessen the effects of those within his control, most worked against Lee to prevent the success he expected to achieve. Lee entered the battle outnumbered, fighting on ground and with tactics not of his choosing, faced with supply vulnerabilities if he remained static, on exterior lines compared to the Union

forces, and with many of the same command, control, communications, and intelligence problems his army had experienced in previous battles. Perhaps the most telling consideration, and another example from FM 100-5 of events that help lead to a culminating point, is that Lee made the assumption that the Union army would not put up a creditable fight. But the Union army was now fighting on their land, protecting their own families, and under more capable leadership. The army Lee faced at Gettysburg was not the demoralized or easily panicked opponent Lee was used to.

Montgomery, in The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg, explains the defeat this way, "But we do know that from the first day to the last, hesitation, delay, faulty staff work, lack of cooperation among corps and division commanders, made a Confederate victory impossible."[43] Henderson describes "the greatest conflict of the war as the most prolific of blunders."[44]

The battle had extracted a significant toll on Meade's forces as well, therefore Meade choose not to counterattack Lee on July 4th. If he had, he probably would not have been successful since Lee had pulled back and prepared defensive positions guarding the mountain passes. Coddington, in The Gettysburg Campaign, explained Lee's situation as follows:

> Lee had little doubt about his next step when all expectations of a Yankee counterattack faded with the setting sun. He realized that his army had lost its offensive punch after its three days of persistent and futile pounding of Union positions. With no counterattack on 4 July, Lee knew he had no recourse but to withdraw. If enemy forces should close in on him from all sides, and they were bound to do so before long, he could no longer hope to live off the country; even if he managed to fend off efforts to destroy him, he realized that in the process he would exhaust his already depleted supplies of ammunition and wear out his horses.[45]

Lee thus knew he had lost the battle but he also was well aware he had not yet lost his army. Operationally, he was neither defeated or destroyed. Even during his withdrawal to Virginia he had made plans for a defense in the hope that Meade might attack at a disadvantage to give Lee an operational victory. From General Lee's point of view, his actions indicate that he did not believe he had reached his culminating point.

The results of Gettysburg on the Confederacy were both immediately telling and yet protracted. The defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg put the South's armies on the strategic defensive forever after and operational victories became increasingly difficult to achieve. Lee's offensive capacity was exhausted in early August. He could never again maneuver to flank the Army of the Potomac. The Confederates turned more and more to an acceptance of fighting entrenched warfare from field fortifications. The frontal assault became obsolete.[46] Thereafter, the Confederacy continued to shrink in both military power, territory, and political resolve.

Morale was seriously affected by the defeats of 1863, as evidenced by the fact that two-thirds of the new congressmen elected to the 1863 Confederate Congress had been men opposed to secession in 1861. The Confederates could no longer count on military success to sustain their will.[47] From July 1863 onward, the willpower of the southern people seemed to suffer the most and became an even more important indicator of declining Confederate strength. At the very moment the South needed to stiffen its will to compensate for an overall decline in military fortunes, that will became less reliable.

Reunion and peace began to have attractive features. Thus defeatism crept slowly into the hearts of large numbers of Confederates."[48]

Lee's army was seriously hurt but not destroyed by Gettysburg. The battle cost twenty-eight thousand men or 33 percent of his available forces compared to only 20 percent for Meade. The Confederacy soon made up these shortages by conscription, but the Southerners' enthusiasm for both conscription and volunteering immediately started to decline. More importantly, desertion rose significantly. By November 1864 units were at 50 percent strength. An officer wrote his father, "The men can't be prevented from deserting when they think there is no prospect ahead for getting home and among the deserters are some of the bravest men of our army."[49] The total losses were so great that Lee could not take the offensive again. In the remaining months of 1863 and thereafter, the war turned defensive in an effort to check the North.

The Army of Northern Virginia temporarily ate well while in Pennsylvania but soon after their return home the stationary army again stripped the countryside, resulting in an acute shortage of forage and subsistence. The shortage of forage was so severe that the cavalry and artillery practically ceased to exist due to weak and unusable horses. The remaining good horses were so widely scattered for fodder that they were unavailable for quick recall. The fact that Lee's Pennsylvania campaign was based in part on his need to revert to the same methods of foraging the enemy's countryside the European armies used in the 1700's reveals the strategic handicap under which the Confederacy worked. The Confederacy could not fight as it needed to because it always was limited by lack of supplies.

The Gettysburg Campaign is a case in point where it chose to invade to obtain those supplies.

Luvaas and most other Civil War historians give due credit to Lee for his skill at the operational level of war, but Luvaas further explains in "Lee and the Operational Art" that Lee's tactical conduct at Gettysburg was far from impressive. Lee had never commanded a soldier in battle until he took command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee's tactical weakness at Gettysburg, style of command, and earlier battles support the conclusion that he felt more comfortable at the operational level of war rather than the tactical.[50]

As a soldier, Lee devised his campaign plan with military objectives in mind, but he overlooked its potential impact on the other elements of national security: economic, diplomatic and political. Any hope that the Europeans would intervene in the South's economic and diplomatic favor was conclusively lost. Why the South Lost the Civil War describes the larger ramifications.

> Once Lee reached Pennsylvania, to withdraw without battle would look like a defeat; to give battle and then withdraw would still look like a defeat. Either way, Lee's raid was doomed to be perceived as a defeat by the Confederate public unless he had been able to destroy the Army of the Potomac--a most unlikely eventuality. The result of Confederate failure to reckon the cost properly was that, when the inevitable withdrawal came, Confederate will was damaged more than it would have been if Lee had merely remained quietly in Virginia and let the Union do the attacking. Coming at about the same time as Vicksburg and Tullahoma, the news of Gettysburg served only to thicken the gloom of the southern people. The South had not paused to count the cost when Lee marched north, and when he returned it would be difficult to compensate for the military consequences.[51]

Conclusion

Lee's 1863 campaign into Pennsylvania is an excellent case study from which to investigate many of Clausewitz's theories about war. The concept of the culminating point is particularly well served by what happened in the campaign. But before going further, it is worth remembering that Clausewitz wrote On War with the intent of explaining war in the broader context of its nature and how and why it is conducted. He desired his readers to think why and how, and not to just study war in a dogmatic way seeking rules for application to only a certain situation. On War provides Clausewitz's theories and wisdom on the subject for posterity. He offered few cookie cutter solutions. For this reason most of his theories are still relevant.

Gettysburg. The high water mark of the Confederacy. The turning point of the Civil War. If these so widely accepted views are true then Lee must have exceeded his army's culminating point. Did not Lee lose the battle? Was he not forced to withdraw from Pennsylvania and eventually surrender the Army of Northern Virginia? While these are true, Lee and his army never did exceed their strategic, operational, or tactical culminating points in the Gettysburg campaign. To review, the culminating point is that point in time when the attacker has reached the lowest point of offensive power and the defender has amassed his relative optimum strength and unleashes what Clausewitz called the "flashing sword of vengeance", the counterattack. The balance of advantage tips to the defender, who then attacks and defeats the enemy.[52]

It is important to note that the culminating point is relative to the enemy and not an absolute, unilateral phenomenon. The enemy must respond to an attacking force's passage of its culminating point to give the culminating point meaning, otherwise the attacker may still achieve success. If an attacker's combat power is reduced to almost nothing in comparison to the defender's, yet he continues the attack and is successful, then he has not passed his culminating point because the defender did not or could not take advantage and force upon the attacker the culminating point. Conversely, if the now weaker attacker does revert to the defense and is successful at preserving his force from the counterattack then that commander has stopped just short of his culminating point. He has not exceeded it. And if, like Gettysburg, the counterattack never comes, the passage of the culminating point is never proved. The concept of the culminating point, like war, rests upon two opposing sides seeking superiority and victory over each other. While Meade may have won the battle, he did not achieve decisive victory nor was Lee actually defeated. Meade did not impose his will nor cause the Army of Northern Virginia to cease military actions.

Tactically, the Army of Northern Virginia, although at two-thirds of its former strength, was still capable and could have repulsed an attack. If Meade had attacked on July 4th, within a day or two Lee would have exhausted his ammunition. At that point Meade could have conclusively defeated Lee. Since the counterattack and follow-on decisive battle never took place, Lee did not exceed his culminating point.

Operationally, Lee marched his remaining army home to Virginia and, from his point of view, declared he had achieved many of his campaign objectives. He had successfully removed the Union army from Virginia and disrupted their plans for a summer campaign. He had lived for a month on the north's hospitality and returned with large quantities of supplies. Lee said his campaign had not sought a decisive battle, but if attacked, he had hoped to catch the enemy off balance and destroy it bit by bit. In fact, Lee was the one caught off balance, but his army was not destroyed. Once the two armies joined at Gettysburg, Lee lost his freedom of maneuver and he realized there was little more to be gained by staying in Pennsylvania. Staying would risk his army to possible defeat so Lee chose to withdraw.

Strategically, the events at Gettysburg did not lead directly to the conclusion of the war. The Confederacy lasted almost two more years. Many other events and reasons contributed more directly to the Confederacy's eventual defeat than the battle at Gettysburg. The strategic culminating point was not passed. The price the Confederate States of America paid at Gettysburg was indeed high and few refute the Gettysburg Campaign as the high water mark of the Confederacy, but if Clausewitz were reviewing Civil War history, no doubt he would have said it further proves not only his concept of the culminating point, but many of his other theories as well.

It is important to recognize the culminating points at different levels. Each level of execution of war, strategic, operational, and tactical, has a corresponding culminating point that can influence the outcome of an engagement or battle (tactical), a major operation

or campaign (operational), or of the war (strategic). FM 100-5 explains and cites several examples of each.

The culminating point, if recognized, serves as the trigger point for the counterattack or counteroffensive. By definition victory should be assured since the attacker no longer has the capability to successfully defend. Today, commanders could select applicable events leading to or forecasting an enemy's culminating point and then direct intelligence collection assets to look for those as priority intelligence requirements. Sensing the culminating point is critical to taking advantage of it. Meade never counterattacked Lee because he sensed that favorable ratios and combat advantage had not passed to his army. Meade was probably correct tactically. Lee was prepared to defend himself and could have done so successfully. But operationally, had Meade pressed the battle, Lee would have quickly run out of ammunition and eventually would have suffered tremendous losses, perhaps operational defeat, before he could safely cross the Potomac. Of course, the Gettysburg Campaign is by no means a full and conclusive base from which to draw and formulate principles or rules about what brings about the culminating point. That was not the purpose of this study. However, Gettysburg has provided some characteristics, traits, or events which may benefit a modern commander to consider.

While the phenomenon of the culminating point did not determine the outcome in Pennsylvania in 1863, Lee's campaign offers important insights about this dynamic concept. Lee in the Gettysburg Campaign exhibited many traits which contributed to the results in Pennsylvania and, had either side pressed the battle and brought

about the Confederate's culminating point, would have contributed to that as well. The following are some examples: unwarranted overconfidence, poor command, control, and coordination, unrealistic expectations of decisive results, limited tactical options forcing an attack, assuming a weak and broken enemy, unfavorable force ratios, inadequate intelligence, logistical shortages/dependence on uncertain supply sources, tactical miscalculations, over-reliance on morale as a combat multiplier, failure to think through possible branches and sequels to the campaign plan, and poor battlefield communications.

Events causing a culminating point fall into two broad categories: those known to or imposed on the attacker by his own actions and those brought about by the enemy. In Lee's case, the overwhelming majority of events or traits which contributed to the unsuccessful campaign are the former; Lee hastened his own defeat more than did Meade.

Lee took risks in hopes of achieving a great operational or strategic victory but knowing he confronted many practical problems, just as history records many other battles where calculated risks produced great results. Confidence in one's plans is not a fault but it must be balanced with an honest acceptance of capabilities. Commanders are expected to make necessary decisions based on the facts at hand in concert with their military genius to arrive at a proper course of action. Lee and his lieutenants accepted some problems and overlooked others with the expectation that leadership, the South's courageous men, and a cooperative enemy would bring victory.

Today's commanders and their staffs must have an understanding of possible characteristics or traits which may be forecasters of an approaching culminating point, either for their own forces or for those of the enemy. These modern warriors will have to analyze these events in the context of the current situation and use their judgment to decide the degree of applicability. While it may be obvious that a logistical shortfall will eventually upset a plan, the question of when and to what extent is critical to whether it will hasten a culminating point or just cause an inconvenience or delay in meeting the objectives. There can be no checklist to detect a culminating point, but an understanding of its application in military art is absolutely critical. The concept of the culminating point is a mind-set to employ conscientiously.

The concept of the culminating point is certainly still relevant, applicable, and actually practiced, as evident by the 1991 war in Iraq and Kuwait. Operation DESERT STORM provided the U.S. Army with an opportunity to validate AirLand Battle doctrine. By all measures and analysis, the doctrine proved to be not only well founded, but greatly accepted and followed. That has not always been the case with Army doctrine. A doctrine that does not make sense to the soldiers using it during a conflict is usually ignored. Whether at the level of the Commander in Chief of Central Command, a corps commander, or a brigade commander at the front, commanders and staff used and highly endorsed AirLand Battle doctrine.

DESERT STORM campaign planners used the concept of the culminating point as a key element in the development of their plan. Colonel Douglas Craft, Chief, Plans Division of CENTCOM J-5,

identified the key elements that would cause the ground force to eventually pass their culminating point, then created a plan designed to forestall that point in time as long as possible. The campaign had to be swift and hinged on success in a single decisive battle; therefore, "the combination of limited infrastructure, strategic and theater distances, and massive transportation requirements emphasized the need for a campaign that would produce a decision before the logistics system could fracture under the weight of an attrition battle."[53] Had the campaign been fought as the Iraqi's envisioned, the coalition forces might have passed not an operational culminating point, but a strategic culminating point as well. A slow moving, high-casualty war could have strained the coalition and the will of the U.S. public beyond the point of supporting the achievement of the strategic objectives. The point is that CENTCOM officers did not dismiss the culminating point concept as doctrinal trivia, but actively used the theory in conjunction with the rest of AirLand Battle doctrine to develop and execute a highly successful campaign for the coalition and United States Armed Forces.

This use of the culminating point concept in a theater operation would not have been possible nine years ago, when AirLand Battle doctrine was only two years old. Officers then were still questioning the value of an old theory and its application to the then new AirLand Battle doctrine. The Army adage that it takes "ten years for new doctrine to be accepted, internalized, and used without hesitance" may be on the mark. The consensus among Army officers today is that AirLand Battle is a sound doctrine and does not require much modification. Furthermore, officers readily accept and apply

the culminating point concept. Officers in the 1993 U.S. Army War College Class discuss the application of the concept just as freely and easily as they do the concept of the center of gravity or the principles of war. Yet, the very same officers, as students in 1984 at the Command and General Staff College, generally discounted Clausewitz and his theories as not worth study and lacking applicability to modern doctrine.

Although the Army has fostered a new, greater understanding of military theory among its officer corps in the past eleven years, more should be done. The amount of instructional time the Army allocates at either the Command and General Staff College or the War College is still inadequate for the basic education an officer needs to be marginally versed in the foundations of military art and theory, or in the great theorists such as Clausewitz. For example, the War College core curriculum devotes only six hours to the review of military theory. Such an important part of the military art that forms the underpinnings of our doctrine deserves more time. Even so, the highly professional officer corps has learned much in the past decade in terms of appreciating, understanding, and applying the theoretical foundations of our doctrine to the art of the operational level of war.

FM 100-5 has reintroduced the culminating point to the U.S. Army and has contributed to the educational process to help soldiers detect the culminating point with the "discriminative judgment" Clausewitz said was necessary. Studying campaigns like Gettysburg can be very useful for a better appreciation of theoretical and doctrinal concepts. A better understanding of theory and its

relationship to doctrine is important; understanding the key concept of the culminating point is one example.

ENDNOTES

[1]Department of the Army, Operations, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington: U.S. Department of the Army, 5 May 1986), 181.

[2]Ibid., 181.

[3]Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 528.

[4]Operations, 181.

[5]Operations, 179.

[6]T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," David H. Donald, ed., Why the North Won the Civil War (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 47-48.

[7]Jay Luvaas, "Lee and the Operational Art: The Right Place, The Right Time," Parameters Vol. XXII, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 16.

[8]Peter Paret, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 424.

[9]Ibid., 424.

[10]Donald, 40.

[11]Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 7.

[12]G.F.R. Henderson, The Civil War: A Soldier's View (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 159.

[13]Hagerman, 121.

[14]Ibid., 110.

[15]Ibid., 110.

[16]Paret, 428.

[17]Hagerman, 110.

[18]Edwin B. Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 4.

[19]Paret, 422.

[20]Ibid., 420-421.

[21]Ned Bradford, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York: Meridian, 1989), 355.

[22]Coddington, 9.

[23]Hagerman, 137.

[24]Henderson, 226.

[25]James Stuart Montgomery, The Shaping of a Battle: Gettysburg (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1959), 7.

[26]Luvaas, 3.

[27]Coddington, 9.

[28]Ibid., 187.

[29]Henderson, 225, 229.

[30]Montgomery, 8-9.

[31]Henderson, 229.

[32]Richard E. Beringer et al., Why the South Lost the Civil War (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 252.

[33]Coddington, 25.

[34]Bradford, 356-357.

[35]Coddington, 182.

[36]Ibid., 186.

[37]Beringer, 261.

[38]Ibid., 261.

[39]Hagerman, 139.

[40]Ibid., 140.

[41]Henderson, 245.

[42]Ibid., 245.

[43]Montgomery, 222.

[44]Henderson, 166.

[45]Coddington, 535.

[46]Hagerman, 142.

[47]Beringer, 265.

[48]Ibid., 267-269.

[49]Ibid., 266.

[50]Luvaas, 7.

[51]Beringer, 264.

[52]Howard, 55.

[53]Douglas W. Craft, An Operational Analysis of the Persian Gulf War (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 31 August 1992), 10.

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